

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 AID-05 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-07 FRB-03

INR-07 NSAE-00 USIA-06 TRSE-00 XMB-02 OPIC-03

SP-02 LAB-04 EPG-02 SIL-01 OMB-01 NSC-05 SS-15

STR-04 CEA-01 PRS-01 PA-01 L-03 /088 W

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R 202233Z JUL 77

FM AMEMBASSY MEXICO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3657

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MEXICO 12034

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: ECON, MX, CGEN

SUBJECT: TOURISM IN MEXICO: YANKEE COME BACK

1. SUMMARY: AT THE END OF THE ECHEVERRIA ADMINISTRATION LAST DECEMBER, MEXICO'S ONCE-BOOMING TOURIST BUSINESS WAS IN A SAD STATE. ALTHOUGH REASONS FOR THE DECLINE WERE DISPUTED, ALL NEW GOM OFFICIALS SEEMED TO AGREE THAT RETURNING TOURISM TO ITS ROLE AS MEXICO'S TOP FOREIGN EXCHANGE EARNER WAS KEY TO MEXICO'S ECONOMIC RECOVERY. NOW EIGHT MONTHS INTO THE LOPEZ PORTILLO ADMINISTRATION, GOM EFFORTS IN TOURISM HAVE STOPPED THE DECLINE AND SLOWLY BEGUN TO RECAPTURE THE INTERNATIONAL TOURISTS' INTEREST IN MEXICO. END SUMMARY.

2. THE LOPEZ PORTILLO ADMINISTRATION ENTHUSIASTICALLY INITIATED LEGISLATIVE, ECONOMIC, AND PUBLIC RELATIONS REFORMS TO IMPROVE TOURISM. FOUR LEGAL MOVES HAVE HAD PARTICULAR IMPACT ON THE AMERICAN TOURIST:

- A) DECISION NOT TO PROSECUTE SMALL DRUG-OFFENDERS;
- B) ELIMINATION OF RED TAPE INVOLVED IN THE RETURN OF STOLEN AIRCRAFT (THE AMERICAN SMALL AIRCRAFT ASSOCIATION, CONFIDENTIAL

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WHICH HAD ISSUED WARNINGS TO ITS MEMBERS ABOUT TRAVELLING TO MEXICO, IS NOW ENCOURAGING ITS MEMBERS TO FLY TO MEXICO);

- C) A RETURN TO OLD LEGISLATION WHICH ALLOWS THE POSTING OF A BOND, RATHER THAN IMPRISONMENT, IN THE CASE OF AN AUTOMOBILE ACCIDENT.

D) DECISION NOT TO CHECK LUGGAGE OF TOURISTS ARRIVING FROM NORTH AMERICA.

3. IN RESPONSE TO A PERCEIVED "ANTI-MEXICAN" CAMPAIGN IN THE US PRESS, THE GOM HAS CONCENTRATED ITS GREATEST EFFORT IN PUBLIC RELATIONS GESTURES AND PROGRAMS. IN AN ATTEMPT TO CANCEL THE (INCORRECT) ANTI-ISRAELI IMAGE OF MEXICO BECAUSE OF ITS UN VOTE EQUATING ZIONISM WITH RACISM, LOPEZ PORTILLO IN HIS FEBRUARY VISIT TO WASHINGTON PERSONALLY MET WITH AMERICAN JEWISH LEADERS, WHO SUBSEQUENTLY ANNOUNCED AN END TO THE JEWISH TOURIST BOYCOTT OF MEXICO. THE AMERICAN JEWISH CONGRESS AND B'NAI B'RITH HAVE AGAIN BEGUN TO ORGANIZE TOURS TO MEXICO. IN ADDITION THE GOM HAS CONTRACTED TWO NEW YORK AD AGENCIES, CANNON ADVERTISING ASSOCIATION, AND JOSEPH JACOBSEN INC., TO IMPROVE MEXICO'S TOURIST IMAGE IN THE US PRESS WITH PARTICULAR EMPHASIS ON THE JEWISH PRESS. IN JUNE THE SECRETARY OF TOURISM PLAYED HOST TO A GROUP OF US SENIOR JOURNALISTS, INVITED FOR A TWO-WEEK ALL-EXPENSES PAID TOUR OF MAJOR MEXICAN ATTRACTIONS.

4. THE PR EFFORTS OF THE GOM HAVE NOT BEEN RESTRICTED TO THE US: SPAIN# JAPAN AND THE FRG ARE CURRENT TARGETS FOR GOM PUBLICITY CAMPAIGNS TO INCREASE THE NUMBER OF TOURISTS WITH THE BELIEF THAT THESE MARKETS HAVE BEEN UNDEREXPLOITED
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IN THE PAST. ALSO, WITHIN MEXICO, COURTESIES AT BORDER CROSSINGS AND AIRPORTS HAVE BEEN INSTITUTED (WITH SPOTTY PERFORMANCE) AND A PUBLIC EDUCATION CAMPAIGN BEGUN TO ENCOURAGE BETTER TREATMENT OF THE TOURIST BY ALL MEXICANS.

5. THE CRUCIAL ECONOMIC MOVE TO BRING TOURISM TO MEXICO WAS THE DEVALUATION OF THE PESO WHICH, DURING THE WINTER MONTHS AT LEAST, MADE MEXICO THE BARGAIN OF THE CARIBBEAN BASIN. ALSO OFFICIAL FUNDS ARE BEING PUMPED INTO EXPANSION AND IMPROVEMENT OF MEXICAN TOURIST FACILITIES. THE BANK OF MEXICO WILL FUNNEL \$40 MILLION (US) TO THE NATIONAL TOURIST DEVELOPMENT FUND THIS YEAR, AND THE WORLD BANK HAS JUST GRANTED A CREDIT OF \$42 MILLION (US) FOR TOURIST DEVELOPMENT IN BAJA CALIFORNIA. WITH FUNDS FROM A MULTIPURPOSE IDB LOAN TO MEXICO, THE STATE OF JALISCO WILL RECEIVE \$5 MILLION DEDICATED TO TOURISM PROMOTION INCLUDING A NEW CONVENTION CENTER FOR GUADALAJARA, MEXICO'S SECOND LARGEST CITY. A FUTURE RESOURCE LIES AHEAD AFTER THE DECISION OF THE WORLD TOURIST ORGANIZATION TO LOCATE AN INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR ADVANCED TOURISM IN MEXICO.

6. THE GOM IS MAKING AN EFFORT TO INCREASE FOREIGN AIR-

LINES SERVICE TO MEXICO. THE EL AL TEL AVIV-MEXICO CITY ROUTE ESTABLISHED LAST NOVEMBER HAS BROUGHT A SIGNIFICANT NUMBER OF ISRAELI TOURISTS TO MEXICO, AND JAPAN AIRLINES HAS RECENTLY ADDED MEXICO CITY TO ITS VANCOUVER ROUTE. MOREOVER, AT THE UPCOMING GOM-US NEGOTIATIONS ON A NEW CIVIL BILATERAL AGREEMENT, A MAJOR OBJECTIVE OF GOM WILL BE INCREASED AIR SERVICE FROM THE US TO MEXICO'S NEW RESORT 7. IN THE AREA OF TOURIST SAFETY, THE BEEFING UP OF THE "GREEN ANGELS" (TOURIST ASSISTANCE/HIGHWAY PATROL) HAS RESULTED IN A REDUCTION OF ARMED ASSAULTS ON HIGHWAY 15 IN SINALOA STATE AND IMPROVED ASSISTANCE IN CASE OF AUTO BREAKDOWN. IN RECOGNITION, THE AMERICAN AUTOMOBILE

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ASSOCIATION, WHICH ISSUED A TRAVEL ADVISORY FOR THE AREA LAST JANUARY, IS NOW CONSIDERING PROGRAMS TO ONCE AGAIN ENCOURAGE ITS MEMBERS TO DRIVE TO MEXICO.

8. CONCLUSION. IN JUNE THE AIRPORT AUTHORITIES ANNOUNCED AN INCREASE OF USERS OF 3.2 OVER LAST YEAR'S FIGURES. ALTHOUGH ENCOURAGING, THIS STATISTIC DID NOT MATCH THE ENTHUSIASTIC STATEMENTS OF MEXICO'S TOURIST OFFICIALS THAT TOURISM IS "GREATLY IMPROVED", THAT THE CRISIS IS OVER", ETC. THE FACT THAT HOTEL OCCUPANCY FOR JULY IS DOWN 10 IS A FURTHER INDICATION THAT TOURISM RECOVERY IN MEXICO WILL BE A LONG UNEVEN PROCESS. INFLATION MUST BE REINED IN IF THE DEVALUATION IS TO BRING IN MORE TOURISTS. THE ENTHUSIASM OF NEW PLANS MUST BE ACTUALIZED-NOT JUST LEFT ON PAPER AS IS OFTEN THE CASE IN MEXICO. MOST IMPORTANT AND MOST DIFFICULT, NEW REGULATIONS, RESOURCE'S AND ATTITUDES MUST BE SPREAD TO THE PEOPLE WITH WHOM THE

TOURIST COMES MOST IN CONTACT, CLERKS, WAITERS, POLICE.
THERE IS HOPE, HOWEVER - IN MAY, A CANADIAN TOURIST RE-
PORTED THAT HE WAS STOPPED FOR A SUPPOSED TRAFFIC VIOLATION,
BRIBED THE POLICEMAN, AND THEN REPORTED THE INCIDENT
THROUGH THE MINISTRY OF TOURISM'S NEW "ACTION LINE".
WITHIN AN HOUR HE HAD HIS \$200 PESOS BACK AND WAS OFFERED
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A CHANCE TO PRESS CHARGES AGAINST THE POLICEMAN. THAT, IN
THE ANNALS OF MEXICAN TOURISM, IS REVOLUTIONARY. LUCEY

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